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THE FUTURE OF THE U.S. NAVY IN THE PERSIAN GULF

by

Austin C. Johnson

March 2004

Thesis Co-Advisors:

Daniel Moran

James Russell

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THE FUTURE OF THE U.S. NAVY IN THE PERSIAN GULF

Austin C. Johnson
Lieutenant, United States Navy, Reserve
B.A., San Diego State University, 1999

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March 2004

Author: Austin C. Johnson

Approved by: Daniel Moran
Thesis Co-Advisor

James Russell
Thesis Co-Advisor

James Wirtz
Chairman, Department of National Security Affairs

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This thesis analyzes a range of possible future scenarios governing security conditions in the Persian Gulf, in order to determine future requirements for forward-deployed Naval forces in the region. Examination of the past 30 years of U.S. Naval activity in the Persian Gulf provides examples of a full spectrum of deployment options ranging from a nominal presence in the 1970's to the recent deployment of forces unmatched in naval history. Two contrasting scenarios, "best case" and "worst case" are proposed by way of establishing a framework to evaluate the naval presence requirements that may arise in the future. Factors that could effect naval presence in the Gulf are success or failure of nation-building in Iraq, the path Iran takes regarding weapons of mass destruction, the progress of the Global War on Terrorism and the perception of American forces by the Arab world. These scenarios reveal the need for sustained naval presence in order to meet the future trends in the Persian Gulf. The Navy's recently implemented Fleet Response Plan calls for "deployment for a purpose." The purpose of naval forces in the Persian Gulf is clear: to provide persistent maritime dominance, power projection and effective crisis response.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

“For more than a century the United States has been the preeminent practitioner of “forward presence” – employing naval forces away from its homeland to deter adversaries, to reassure allies and friends, and to shorten the time for crisis response”.¹ The results of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) have brought about many new questions regarding the requirement for Naval forward presence in the Persian Gulf. The end many of the missions for the Navy, including sanctions enforcement and Maritime Interdiction Operations, and flights to support Operation Southern Watch have left questions regarding the need for continuous naval presence in the Persian Gulf. Can other services with forward deployed bases in the region conduct missions centered on WMD counter-proliferation, and the Global War on Terrorism? Are there practical reasons to reduce naval deployment into the Persian Gulf? The *National Security Strategy of the United States* summons the military to “provide the President with a wider range of military options to discourage aggression or any form of coercion against the United States, our allies and our friends.”² The Navy’s response, the Fleet Response Plan (FRP) as an attempt to change the way the Navy deploys to respond to today’s challenges and future operational commitments. FRP will change the Navy’s readiness posture and institutionalize the capability to surge when required for crisis response, while still meeting current global force presence requirements.³

The purpose of this thesis is to estimate future Naval requirements in the Gulf by analyzing three historical models of Navy operations in the Middle East region over the last 30 years. These models will be used to examine the Navy’s

¹ Roger W. Barnett, “Naval Power For a New Century” Naval War College Review, Winter 2002

² “The National Security Strategy of the United States” September 2002, p. 30

³ Admiral Robert J. Natter, “Creating a Surge Ready Force”, *Naval Institute Proceedings*, September 2003

ability to respond to factors effecting the security in the Gulf. Since assuming the role as “guardian of the Gulf” after the withdrawal of British forces in 1968, Naval force structure has changed significantly. Initially, U.S. naval forces in the region were negligible as the government chose to rely on the “Twin Pillars” of Iran and Saudi Arabia to provide security for the Gulf. This rationale quickly changed with the fall of the Shah of Iran and the Islamic Revolution. Naval forces were quickly deployed to the region in order to secure the flow of oil from the region, and to prevent the further spread of Islamic Fundamentalism. The Navy’s presence in the region remained moderate throughout the 1980’s providing security to shipping during Operation Earnest Will. The character of Naval presence in the Gulf would again change with the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. The Navy is again poised to examine forces structure in the Gulf in the aftermath of Operation Enduring and Iraqi Freedom.

B. SIGNIFICANCE

“The U.S. Navy has been, and will probably remain, an ever-changing and highly operational force, with a bias toward forward deployment.”⁴ In order to determine a new Naval Strategy and plan for possible missions and force structure one must have an understanding of the factors that effect Naval Operations in the Middle East. This thesis provides two future scenarios regarding the security in the Persian Gulf and possible Naval responses. These scenarios are not meant to be predictive; however, they can provide boundaries of possible events. These scenarios can facilitate estimations on the appropriate level of forward naval presence required to meet future commitments.

There are a number of issues that will have an effect on future Naval Operations in the Persian Gulf; the outcome of nation-building in Iraq, the status of Iran’s WMD program, advances toward ending the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), and the perception of America and U.S. forces. Each of these issues are intertwined with another, for example, positives steps toward stability in Iraq

⁴ Peter Swartz, “Sea Changes: Transforming U.S. Navy Deployment Strategy: 1775-2002”, Alexandria, VA, Center for Naval Analyses, July 31 2002, p. 127

could reduce the perception of the U.S. as a colonial power, which in turn could reduce the appeal of terrorist and Islamist extremist rhetoric. That being said, no prediction of the future will be accurate so the Navy must be prepared for any action, positive or negative and be in position to respond accordingly.

C. ORGANIZATION

Chapter II: Historical Analysis of Naval Presence in the Persian Gulf

In order to make a determination of the Navy's future in the Gulf, one must look at past events and the Navy's responses. This chapter will introduce key historical events in the Persian Gulf that have effected the Navy over the past 30 years. During this time frame, the presence of forward-deployed Naval forces has changed considerably. With the withdrawal of British forces "east of the Suez" the United States initially sought to maintain security in the Gulf by bolstering regional powers, the Twin Pillars", Iran and Saudi Arabia, while maintaining a token naval presence. The unexpected events that followed, Islamic Revolution in Iran, Iraqi invasion of Iran and Kuwait and Operation Enduring and Iraqi Freedom, have bolstered U.S. Naval presence to unmatched and previously unimaginable numbers. These events have set the groundwork for today's strategy and mission.

Chapter III: Future Security in the Persian Gulf: A "Best Case" Scenario.

This chapter will examine a series of assumptions that could lead to the reasonable likelihood of greater stability and security in the Persian Gulf. These assumptions include; the stability of a new Iraqi government, the threat reduction of Weapons of mass destruction, progress regarding the GWOT, and an improved image of America's intentions in the region. Each of these factors could effect the need for naval presence in the Gulf.

Chapter IV: Future Security in the Persian Gulf: A "Worse Case" Scenario.

This chapter IV will consider possible future deterioration of conditions in the region and look at possible decisions regarding changing strategies, missions

and effects on force structure. This scenario will provide assumptions counter to the previous chapter in order to create a set of boundaries for the future. Issues considered are: the United States inability to create a viable government in Iraq, the provocative actions of Iran regarding their WMD and missile technology programs, the increase in the frequency and magnitude of terrorist attacks, as well as consequences of greater anti-American rhetoric. The impact of these events will drastically effect Naval requirements in the Gulf and effect the Navy's ability to respond to threats outside the region.

Chapter V: Conclusion.

So, what does the future hold? The most likely scenario – certainly the one easiest to envision -- is the one that manages to deploy a constant-credible presence in the region. The need for the Navy in the Persian Gulf has been a U.S. National Interests since the end of World War II, and will remain so into the next 20 yrs. Due to the constraints of sovereignty issues the Navy remains the best military asset in the region. Persistent carrier presence in the Gulf is required to maintain security, with additional surges of multiple carriers for critical strikes where required.

II. U.S. NAVAL HISTORY IN THE PERSIAN GULF

A. INTRODUCTION

While the uncertainty of the future missions for the U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf continues to be addressed at all levels of Naval and Defense leadership, the answer may lie in the past. The way to determine a better course is to look back at American policy toward the region, from President Nixon's reliance on regional powers of Saudi Arabia and Iran, the twin pillars, to the Persian Gulf being described as an American Lake and a region occupied by U.S. forces. Naval forces present in the Persian Gulf have also shifted drastically; they have gone from a minimal presence used to "show the flag" and promote friendly relations with American allies to the greatest amount of firepower ever assembled in one region. By looking at the American policies and naval strategy in the Persian Gulf over the past 30 years, we can better assess the path to take and some of the obstacles that will need to be addressed in the future.

Within the last 30 years, there have been a number of unpredictable events that have changed American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf. The first was in 1968 with the British announcement that it could no longer uphold the responsibility for security east of the Suez. The reduction of forces in the Persian Gulf was not the only loss; intelligence, and knowledge was also lacking. Responsibility for security in the Persian Gulf was delegated to the regional powers in the Gulf. U.S. military presence in the region was minimal: however, Soviet naval forces deployed into the Gulf in sizeable numbers.

The Carter Doctrine, first introduced in his State of the Union address in 1979, was a response to growing turmoil in the region. This change in policy brought about a change in Naval Strategy. The implementation of Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) brought a larger naval presence into the

Gulf. This moderate presence continued through the Reagan years, and played a significant role in Operation Earnest Will.

The next major event in the Persian Gulf was Iraq's invasion into Kuwait leading to the Gulf War in 1991. The Gulf War brought about a new policy toward the Persian Gulf. America would be the protector of the Gulf and have a great influence throughout the region. Naval forces in the region also increased. The significance of protecting U.S. interests in the region and enforcing UN sanctions against Iraq required a substantial naval presence. The Fifth Fleet was established and U.S. aircraft carriers remained stationed in the Gulf throughout the 1990's.

The final events of consequence were Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Another new chapter has been opened for U.S. Naval strategy. The policies and implications on naval strategy in the aftermath of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom have yet to be decided. However, by analyzing the recent past, policy and strategy options can be recommended or eliminated.

B. THE EARLY YEARS, TWIN PILLARS AND DETENTE

From the end of World War II, the U.S. realized the importance of free flowing oil to Western allies. The security of these national interests brought naval forces into the Persian Gulf as early as 1948, and some form of forward naval presence has been in the Gulf ever since. Commander Middle East Forces (COMIDEASTFOR) - operating from the British base in Bahrain - was established in 1949 primarily to provide intelligence, liaison with allied militaries, and conduct official diplomatic calls on civilian and military dignitaries, as well as to protect our interest in the region, and our willingness to assist them when needed.⁵

⁵ Michael A. Palmer, "On Course to Desert Storm: the United States Navy and the Persian Gulf", Washington, DC, Naval Historical Center, 1992, p. 39

While U.S. presence was minimal, the Royal Navy continued to provide substantial forces regularly assigned to the region throughout the 1950's and into the 1960's. British carriers routinely chopped into the Persian Gulf and British naval forces played a crucial role in defending Kuwait in 1961 when Iraq threatened to attack the newly established country. However, it soon became clear that the British were no longer able to maintain the responsibility of preserving security in the Gulf. In 1968, the British government announced its decision to withdraw British military forces from east of Suez including those contingents stationed in the Gulf.⁶

The effects of British withdrawal were twofold. First there was a tremendous loss of a huge reservoir of historical knowledge, political expertise and analytic ability on events in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula that previously had been available to COMIDEASTFOR. Additionally, the withdrawal of Royal Navy ships and the Royal Air Force removed the only available assets for maritime reconnaissance in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. Prior to withdrawal, U.K. sources and analysts had contributed about 80% of the political intelligence on the Persian Gulf area available to COMIDEASTFOR.⁷

The British withdrawal also caused a vacuum of power in the region. Concerned that the Soviets, already with some influence in the region, would expand their 'circle of influence' to the warm water ports and rich oil fields along the Persian Gulf, the U.S. gradually accepted the assumption that the Persian Gulf needed to remain friendly to the West. America, still deeply involved in Vietnam and leaning towards an isolationistic foreign policy, limited the Nixon administration from assuming the role of protector of the Gulf. Henry Kissinger, then Nixon's National Security Adviser, wrote:

⁶ W. Seth Carus, Barry McCoy, John R. Hafey, "From MIDEASTFOR to Fifth Fleet: Forward Naval Presence in Southwest Asia", Center for Naval Analyses, Alexandria VA, 1996, p. 53

⁷ Michael A. Palmer, "Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833-1992", Simon & Schuster, New York, 1999, p. 96. (note: originally from MEF Command History, 1971, August 29, 1972)

There was no possible way of assigning any American military force to the Indian Ocean in the midst of the Vietnam War and its attendant trauma. Congress would have tolerated no such commitment; the public would not have supported it.⁸

With these political constraints, the Nixon administration sought to reduce American foreign presence to maintain global security. Responsibility for regional security would be placed in the hands of the local powers. This change in policy, later called the “Nixon Doctrine” was announced in his State of the Union Address of January 22, 1970. President Nixon stated,

Neither the defense nor the development of other nations can be exclusively or primarily an American undertaking.

The nations of each part of the world should assume the primary responsibility for their own well-being; and they themselves should determine the terms of that well-being.

We shall be faithful to our treaty commitments, but we shall reduce our involvement and our presence in other nations’ affairs.⁹

The U.S. relied on the ‘twin pillars’ of Iran and Saudi Arabia for the security of the Persian Gulf. However, it was believed that the continuation of our modest naval presence at “Bahrain would contribute to the stability of the Persian Gulf... and that to withdraw MIDEASTFOR, especially when the British were leaving and the Soviet naval effort was increasing, would give the impression, already gaining ground in Arab circles, that Western interest was waning”.¹⁰

For the U.S. Navy, the primary concern in this period was the growing presence of the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean. While the U.S. sold arms to

⁸ Palmer, “Guardians...” p. 87-8. (note: originally, from Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, Boston and Toronto: Little Brown, 1979, p. 1264

⁹ Ibid, p. 87 (note: originally from *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard M. Nixon*, 1970. p. 9)

¹⁰ Carus, “From MIDEASTFOR...”, p. 58 (note: Originally from U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Near East, *U.S. Interests in and Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, p. 3)

Iran and Saudi Arabia in order to maintain stability in the region, Soviet naval forces deployed to the gulf with growing numbers and frequency to attempt to fill the void left by the British withdrawal. In 1968 U.S. and Soviet naval forces were equal, yet by 1972 Soviet naval forces outnumbered Americans almost 6:1

Table 1. U.S. and Soviet Ship-Days in the Indian Ocean, 1968-1973¹¹

| | 1968 | 1969 | 1970 | 1971 | 1972 | 1973 |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| U.S. | 1,688 | 1,315 | 1,246 | 1,337 | 1,435 | 2,154 |
| Soviet | 1,760 | 3,668 | 3,579 | 3,804 | 8,007 | 8,543 |

Source: "Means of Measuring Naval Power with Special Reference to U.S. and Soviet Activities in the Indian Ocean," prepared for the Subcommittee on Near East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Relations by the Foreign Affairs Division, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 12 May 1974, Washington, 1974, 93 Cong., 2d session., pp. 4-7.

The Carter administration recognized that the oil in the Persian Gulf was vital to U.S. and Western economies and moved quickly to strengthen the American position in the region. "In mid-1977, Presidential Review Memorandum 10 identified "the Persian Gulf as a vulnerable and vital region, to which military concern ought to be given". Presidential Directive 18, signed by Carter on August 24, 1977, called for the establishment of what would become the Rapid Deployment Force – a "deployment force of light divisions with strategic mobility' for global contingencies, particularly in the Persian Gulf region and Korea."¹²

Secretary of Defense Harold Brown stressed the importance of naval and tactical air forces and improved strategic mobility, assets that would give the United States the capability "to respond effectively and simultaneously to a

¹¹ Palmer, "On Course...", p. 76

¹² Palmer, "Guardians...", p. 101, (note: Originally from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor, 1977-1981", New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983. p. 177)

relatively minor as well as a major military contingency”¹³. This foresight would prove prophetic in the years to come.

C. REVOLUTION AND A NEW TARGET OF CONTAINMENT

In 1979, a series of events occurred that would change the security, U.S. foreign policy and Naval Strategy and in the Persian Gulf. In January 1979, one of the pillars gave way - the Shah was overthrown and Iran fell into chaos. In November, Iranian mobs stormed the U.S. embassy in Teheran holding 66 Americans hostage. In December, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan and established a new puppet government. On January 21, 1980, President Carter gave his State of the Union Address:

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force. ¹⁴

It was at this point that the U.S. assumed primary responsibility for security in the Persian Gulf. From then on American forces would deploy regularly to the region to ensure the free flow of oil to the West. The implication of the Carter Doctrine continued through the Reagan administration. In contrast to the almost frenzied activity of 1979 and 1980, between 1981 and 1986, Washington paid relatively little attention to the Gulf. This appears to have reflected two considerations. First, there was little perceived need to change the policies set in place during the early days of the Reagan administration, which essentially followed the outlines of the Carter Doctrine. CENTCOM continued the efforts initiated by the RDJTF to enhance U.S. military capabilities for the region. Second, developments in the Iran-Iraq War rarely appeared to threaten U.S.

¹³ Palmer, “Guardians...”, p. 101, (note: Originally from David A. Quinlan, *The Role of the Marine Corps in Rapid Deployment Forces*, Washington: National Defense University Press, 1983, pp. 1-2)

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 106 (note: originally taken from Carter State of the Union Address, January 23, 1980, State Department, *Basic Documents, 1977-1980*, #253)

interests in the region. As a result, the Gulf was not a high priority for officials in Washington.¹⁵

Though the Persian Gulf was on the political back burner, the period 1979-1990 saw a transformation in the character of the naval commitment to the region. The size of the forces assigned to the area grew substantially, both in absolute strength and as a proportion of total forward-deployed naval forces. At times, especially during 1980-1981, operations in the region stretched the resources of the Navy to the limit.¹⁶

In 1980, Carrier days in the Indian Ocean increased over five hundred percent. Carrier strength remained continuous throughout the 1980's with the exception of 1986, while the U.S. conducted operations against Libya. The reason for the increase in naval strength was due to the efforts to protect neutral shipping in the Persian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq war during most of the 1980's. Early on, naval forces were not actively used to protect shipping. Their presence was merely to demonstrate U.S. resolve to keep the war from spreading through the region. However, it was not until late 1986 that U.S. forces were called upon to escort ships from neutral ports through the Straits of Hormuz. The Iran-Iraq War brought a threat to shipping in the Persian Gulf as both sides attacked shipping bound to and from the other. The U.S. reflagged Kuwaiti oil tankers to allow them to be escorted by naval vessels through the Gulf. The reflagging and naval convoys, known as Operation Earnest Will, were only partially a means of protecting oil exports from the gulf, it was also a way to demonstrate Western resolve to Arab allies to counter Soviet involvement in the region.¹⁷

¹⁵ Carus, "From MIDEASTFOR...", pp. 87-8 (Originally from Crowe, *The Line of Fire*)

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 97

¹⁷ Martin S. Navias and E.R. Hooton, "Tanker Wars; The Assault on Merchant Shipping During the Iran-Iraq Crisis, 1980-1988, New York, I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996, p. 163.

Table 2. Increases in U.S. Naval strength in the Indian Ocean, 1979-88 ¹⁸

| | Surface Ship Days | Carrier Ship Days | Percent Deployed Carriers | of Average Yearly Carrier Strength |
|------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| 1976 | 1,279 | 19 | 3 | 0.1 |
| 1977 | 1,439 | 100 | 7 | 0.3 |
| 1978 | 1,207 | 35 | 3 | 0.1 |
| 1979 | 2,612 | 153 | 9 | 0.4 |
| 1980 | 6,993 | 836 | 51 | 2.3 |
| 1981 | 5,651 | 646 | 39 | 1.7 |
| 1982 | 5,361 | 443 | 27 | 1.2 |
| 1983 | 4,704 | 406 | 24 | 1.0 |
| 1984 | 5,335 | 410 | 28 | 1.1 |
| 1985 | 5,136 | 475 | 36 | 1.3 |
| 1986 | 3,580 | 185 | 13 | 0.5 |
| 1987 | 6,760 | 412 | 30 | 1.1 |
| 1988 | 7,991 | 412 | 30 | 1.1 |

Source: Derived from Adam Siegel, Karen Domabyl, and Barbara Lingberg, *Deployment of U.S. Navy Aircraft Carriers and Other Surface Ships, 1976-1988*, Alexandria, VA, 1989, pp. 13, 15, 21, 26-27.

No carriers were assigned to MIDEASTFOR during this period. Carriers were deployed to the Indian Ocean and the North Arabian Sea, operating under the control of Seventh Fleet. Before 1979, there had been some carrier visits to ports in the Gulf. The emergence of Iran as an adversary, however, changed the military climate in the Gulf. Iran dominated the Strait of Hormuz, creating perceived risks for carriers coming into or out of the Gulf. In addition, it was believed that it would be difficult to operate carriers in the constricted waters of the Gulf. To remain well out of air attack range, fleet policy dictated that carriers operate a minimum of 200 nautical miles away from the Iranian littoral.¹⁹

¹⁸ Palmer, "On Course...", p. 97

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 105

D. SOVIETS, SADDAM AND SANCTIONS

The Bush administration entered offices expecting to devote little time and effort to the Gulf. 1990 brought about a new era of foreign policies and defense strategies. The fall of the Soviet Union brought about the end of the “bipolar” international system and the U.S. was the sole global superpower. The Cold War was over and the Bush administration set about implementing a “peace-time” strategy to preserve global security. As Secretary of State James Baker noted, “Like almost everybody else. I assumed that with Iraq and Iran would be exhausted and impoverished from their decade-long war, the Persian Gulf would be relatively quiet”.²⁰

During this quiet period, the U.S. gradually reduced its forces in the region. By the summer of 1990, only five naval vessels patrolled the gulf, the smallest contingent since the late 1970’s. However, forward deployed forces would still remain a viable source toward deterrence and the preservation of regional stability. Bush’s new strategy regarding forward presence was,

Peacetime forward presence will remain a key element of U.S. strategy, albeit at somewhat reduced levels, consistent with changing threats. Forces to forward presence are essential for strong security alliances. Forward-deployed forces play a critical role in deterring aggression, preserving regional stability and protecting U.S. interests. They are visible evidence of U.S. commitment and provide our initial capability for crisis response and escalation control.²¹

The perceived peace of the early 1990’s was shaken by the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. Saddam Hussein’s rash move showed how unpredictable the security in the Persian Gulf was. The idea of Saddam controlling the vast oil

²⁰ Ibid, p. 92 (Originally from: James A. Baker III, with Thomas M. DeFrank, “The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992”, New York, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995, p. 43)

²¹ Carus, “From MIDEASTFOR ...”, p. 93 (Originally from: Vice President Dick Cheney, Annual Report, January 1991, p. 4)

riches of the Northern Gulf sent shockwaves throughout the Western world. The President told the American people:

Our jobs, our way of life, our own freedom, and the freedom of friendly countries around the world would all suffer if control of the world's great oil reserves fell into the hands of that one man, Saddam Hussein."²²

During the commencement of the assault the Middle East Force consisted of the smallest naval contingency in decades. Hours later, the *Independence* battle group steamed into the Northern Arabian Sea and arrived on station in the Gulf of Oman within days. The *Eisenhower* battle groups headed en route for the Suez canal. Within days of the invasion of Kuwait, carrier aircraft were in range to help defend the Arabian Peninsula. These forces would be the first assigned for "Desert Shield".

While the fleet's presence in the region did not deter Saddam's attack on Kuwait, it did make it clear to the Iraqi dictator that further advances could cost him dearly. In hindsight, Saddam probably had no intention of invading Saudi Arabia, but the inveterate risk-taker might have launched such an attack if powerful U.S. naval and air forces were not close at hand.²³

The Persian Gulf War marked the opening of a new chapter in the history of the United States Navy. In January 1991, Vice Admiral Stanley "Stan" Arthur, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, equipped with six aircraft carriers, two battleships and numerous other surface combatants, led the largest armada since World War II.²⁴ For the first time in thirty years, carriers transited

²² Edward J. Mardola and Robert J. Schneller Jr., "Shield and Sword: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf War", Washington, Naval Historical Center, 1998, p. 54 (Originally from: George Bush, *Remarks to Department of Defense Employees*, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents 26, 20 August 1990, p. 1256)

²³ Edward J. Mardola, "The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf", Naval Historical Center

²⁴ Marvin Pokrant, "Desert Shield at Sea: What the Navy Really Did", Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1999, p.3

through the Straits of Hormuz and into the Persian Gulf. Hundreds of Tomahawk cruise missiles and carrier-based aircraft would strike strategic targets deep in Iraqi territory. Thousands of Marines were deployed to play a key role in the initial assault, focusing the attention of the Iraqis while coalition ground forces crossed the desert and trapped a large portion of the Iraqi Army.

By the end of the Gulf War, the U.S. had an exceptional number of naval forces in the Persian Gulf. These forces were maintained throughout much of the 1990's. The Clinton administration entered office planning to continue its predecessor's policies in the Gulf. One significant change in policy, "dual containment", would take a stronger approach in supporting arms sales to Gulf states while containing Iraq and Iran.

In pursuing that balance, the U.S. concentrates on two sets of key objectives: limiting the ability of both Iran and Iraq to threaten regional stability and bolstering the defensive capabilities of our friends in the region – individually, in tandem with their regional partners, and in concert with the U.S. and other friendly outside powers.²⁵

With American's setting a high priority on security in the Persian Gulf, the policy of "dual containment" was not evenly directed at Iran and Iraq. Saddam continued to rattle his saber and threaten other gulf states. U.S. naval forces were called on to curb his behavior. In addition, UN resolutions against Saddam's regime allowed for a stronger hand toward Iraq. U.S and coalition naval forces also were responsible for enforcing UN imposed economic sanctions against Iraq. Surface combatants patrolled the Northern Gulf making it difficult for Saddam to traffic oil for war materials.

Another reason for the sustained naval presence was the responsibility for enforcing UN humanitarian efforts in Southern and Northern Iraq (no-fly zones).

²⁵ Carus, "From MIDEASTFOR...", p. 120 (Originally from: Toni G. Verstandig, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, Department of State, *Principal Elements of U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf*, address to the National Security Industrial Association, Washington, DC, 22 March 1994

Operations Northern and Southern Watch required carrier-based aircraft to patrol the skies above Iraq to prevent Saddam from further atrocities against the Kurds to the north and Shiite in the South.

The Clinton administration's policy reinforced interaction with coalition forces and also encouraged greater interaction with U.S. forces and those of the Gulf States. The "over the horizon" presence of the navy was no longer necessary. Gulf countries openly sought overt operations with U.S. and supported a larger "footprint" (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait).²⁶

D. CONCLUSION: OIF, GWOT AND THE NEW MILLENNIA

The Global war on Terrorism, the fall of Iraq and the capture of Saddam Hussein bring about a new perspective on America's responsibility, and forces necessary for the security of the Persian Gulf. If history shows us anything it is that, the instability in the region makes predicting the future difficult if not impossible. Equally as difficult is attempting to prescribe a strategy to protect American interests and promote security.

The unpredictability of critical events in the Persian Gulf makes policy planning problematic. Policy makers need to analyze past strategies to determine if they were successful, and how to amend them to make them applicable to today's environment. Will domestic pressure to limit forward deployed forces reduce naval presence similar to that of the 1960-1970's? Will moderate, pre-Gulf War forces be required to maintain security in the region? Alternatively, will the constant carrier presence of the post-Gulf War period provide the answer for security and stability?

²⁶ Ibid, p 131

III. FUTURE SECURITY IN THE PERSIAN GULF: A BEST-CASE SCENARIO

March 25, 2024:

USS HALSEY (DDG 97) gets underway from the Kuwaiti port of al-Shuaiba. HALSEY returns to the Northern Gulf to continue *VIGILANT MARINER*, a joint exercise with Iran, Kuwait, U.S., British and Australian Navies. Iraqi Naval attaches are on board the newly commissioned USS MC CAIN (DD 5). Iraqi officials are participating in the exercise while waiting for the final phase of their acquisition of a former U.S. Frigate (FFG 43) to be delivered early 2025. The purpose of *VIGILANT MARINER* is incorporate coalition navies into coordinated ASW and MIW, a L.A class Submarine is operating in the Northern Gulf simulating a Chinese 093 armed with “Rocket torpedoes” and SSN-22’s.

USS REAGAN and its CSG are operating in the central Gulf. Intelligence sources operating with Iraqi Special forces send targeting information on a known terrorist camp posing as Bedouins in the desert along the Iraq/Jordan border. Cruise missiles launched from CSG assets loiter unobtrusively above the target until the friendly forces have dispersed. Another L.A submarine is positioned off the coast of Iran conducting Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) monitoring a Chinese Frigate in port at Bushehr.

Outside of FIFTH FLEET Headquarters, Bahrain, a man is stopped at the gate by Bahraini and U.S. soldiers. He attempts to detonate a bomb attached around his waist, however, U.S. forces disable the would be attacker and his bomb with a short EM pulse. Bahraini forces take the assailant into custody to be tried by the local authority. This is only the fifth attempted attack on U.S. forces in the Middle East this year due mainly to the exhaustion of popular support for terrorist attacks.

A. INTRODUCTION

The account described above presents a “best case” scenario for security in the Persian Gulf in 2024. It provides a realistic expectation of what could happen under certain sets of assumptions that could produce more stability and security in the region. It takes into account many different factors in the Gulf that need to be considered. The stability of the new Iraqi government also has a

drastic effect on the course of the entire Gulf. Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation and the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) are key factors for security and stability in the region. These factors along with U.S. policy and the view of American military forces will determine the mission and purpose of Naval Forces in the Persian Gulf. These challenges to the security in the Gulf are interrelated and cannot be addressed in isolation from each other. A positive outcome from one factor could create momentum for further advances.

B. IRAQ

Iraq poses the biggest questions regarding security in the Persian Gulf. Since he came to power, Saddam Hussein had been a major factor in U.S. policy and military strategy in the Persian Gulf. During his early regime, the United States supported Saddam in order to contain the Soviet Union and later during an eight-year war with Iran. His standing soon changed once the war was over and Saddam chose to immediately by an unexpected attack and invasion of Kuwait. . He displayed further brutality by using chemical weapons on his own people (Kurds and Shiite) in order to show his supremacy. These events led the United States to view Saddam as a serious threat to U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf and overall Gulf security. However his perseverance was unmatched as he reigned through two major wars, and 12 years of UN sanctions. His resilience over the course of a 30 year reign naturally led to the assumption that he, or his sons, would continue to rule Iraq through the next generation. The most likely scenario for Iraq in 2015 is “if alive he (Saddam) would probably be ruling in tandem with his son, Qusay, already designated as the prime candidate to succeed Saddam”.²⁷

With Saddam’s regime out of power, the fate of Iraq is in the hands of its population (or up for grabs). Though U.S. policy advocates democracy, the overriding security issues in the Persian Gulf, hinges on the success of Iraq to sustain a legitimate, stable government capable of maintaining internal security.

²⁷ Judith S. Yaphe, “The Middle East in 2015: The Impact of Regional Trends on U.S. Strategic Planning”, Washington D.C., National Defense University Press, July 2002, p. 225

In any scenario concerning Iraq, it is important to understand that Iraq's future is dependent on Iraqis helping themselves on their own terms. The Iraqi government must allow for political representation and accountability to the public. Large-scale economic reforms must also be taken in order to revitalize the work force and create jobs. These reforms can be supervised by U.S. and/or UN advisors to ensure fairness and to bolster the need for open dialogue without the fear of violence toward opposing parties. The U.S. and UN must create an environment where political and military aid is seen as acting in Iraq's national interest and for the benefit of the Iraqi people.

The Navy will have a limited role in a stable Iraqi scenario. Naval forces will play a part in the joint forces used to assist Iraq. The Navy might also be used to train an Iraqi Navy. The Navy's new Littoral Combat Ship could be used in exercises to build confidence and interaction between the United States and the Gulf States. Naval forces will also be required to guarantee access to key Iraqi port facilities for the Iraqi economy and to maintain the availability for American forces if required. These missions will include Anti-terrorism and Force Protection (AT/FP) as well as ASW and MIW.

C. WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

The biggest threat of WMD proliferation left in the Persian Gulf is Iran. WMD proliferation in Iran could diminish; however, it would not be realistic to assume that states in the region would halt all production and procurement of WMD in the future. Nor is there any way "way to predict or know the scale of efforts being undertaken by key threats and other major regional actors, along with the difficulty in determining their capabilities in given types of weapons, and in characterizing the risk which these weapons present".²⁸ However, an argument could be made that certain factors could cause a reduction in the pace at which they are seeking to gain WMD.

²⁸ Anthony H. Cordesman, "Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East: Regional Trends, National Forces, Warfighting Capabilities, Delivery Options and Weapons Effects", Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 15, 2003, p. 3

A number of factors could possibly reduce WMD proliferation in Iran. The fall of Iraq has put Iran's leadership in a curious dilemma. The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq has removed much of the original strategic motivation for acquiring nuclear weapons for Tehran. However, the current strategic rationale, and now acts as a way to deter the United States from creating a fate for the Iranian government similar to that of Hussein's regime.²⁹

While there is still considerable debate regarding the impetus for Iran's WMD program, most analysts agree that a moderate regime with open economic ties to the West would be more likely to adhere to Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and additional protocols and provide for greater transparency regarding their civilian nuclear power plants. Security assurances from the U.S. and UN, coupled with a moderate Iranian regime more accountable to the population would open the door for debate regarding their WMD program and the distinctions between "Iran's legitimate security needs and nuclear weapons that are illegitimate as well as the regimes need to uphold NPT obligations... to assure its own security".³⁰

Reducing the ability of regimes in the region to acquire WMD also could prove effective in reducing proliferation. However, the most exasperating aspect of dealing with suppliers is that "the five permanent members of the UN Security Council are the largest suppliers of weapons to the region".³¹ Even with the cooperation of these countries, the fact that technology and knowledge are easily attainable and nearly impossible to regulate makes WMD regulation difficult.

The Navy's ability to deter states from WMD proliferation is limited at best. However, it will still be necessary to have the capability to conduct counter-

²⁹ Brenda Shaffer, "Iran at Nuclear threshold" *Arms Control Today* (November 2003), p. 2

³⁰ Shahram Chubin and Robert S. Litwak, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations", *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no 4 (Autumn 2003), p. 112

³¹ Thomas A. Bowditch, "An American Middle East Policy For a New Century: Is It Time For a Change?", *Persian Gulf Beyond Desert Storm: U.S. Interest in a Multipolar World*, Northfield Vermont, Norwich University, May 1993, p. 148

proliferation strikes as well as Ballistic Missile Defense. In an environment previously described these missions may have less importance. Nevertheless, supplier issues and covert proliferation will continue. Naval forces will remain key assets in intercepting WMD technology with Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) and Leadership Interception Operations (LIO). These missions are not new to naval forces operating in the Gulf and will work to limit states' abilities to import WMD technology and hardware.

D. GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM

The struggle against global terrorism is different from any other war in our history. It will be fought on many fronts against a particularly elusive enemy over an extended period of time³²

With the uncertainty of terrorism, it would not be practical to claim that terrorism will be completely eradicated within the next twenty years or ever. Yet, if certain measures were taken, support for terrorism and acts of terrorism could subside. U.S. military action alone will not put an end to terrorism, however a number of other aspects could reduce terrorism in the region by either addressing the motivation for terrorism in the Middle East, or by limiting the targets (Americans and allies) operating in the Persian Gulf.

Terrorists rely on the support of the people for recruiting, sustenance and concealment. States on the other hand, support terrorist groups for reasons of political expediency and to suit policy goals.³³ In order to take real steps toward ending terrorism, the United States must involve allies and regional powers to convey the idea that political sponsorship of terrorism is not in the best interest of any state. America must assist states in eradicating terrorist infrastructure, and financial support. The U.S. must also reach out to the Muslim population as a whole and express the need to end the support and concealment of terrorists.

³² "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America", September 2002, p. 5

³³ James D. Kiras, "Terrorism and Irregular Warfare", *Strategy in the Contemporary World*, New York, Oxford University Press Inc., 2002, p. 217

The gradual process of attrition requires a significant and consistent investment in time and resources and the political will to sustain the struggle.

Even if significant strides are made toward ending terrorism, the Navy will play a vital role in continuing to pressure remaining terrorist organizations and their supporters. As terrorist organizations become more dispersed, the ability to strike them at a moments notice becomes more critical. The strategic significance of these strikes calls for them to be conducted with complete surprise. Launching land based aircraft could offer precursory notice to potential targets. Carrier based aircraft and seaborne missiles platforms could be launched with little notification and give no indications of U.S. intentions.

E. U.S. IDENTITY IN THE GULF

The perception of U.S. forces, and policy in the region could improve. It is unlikely that these populations will ever embrace America as a friend; however they could have a better perception of American assistance and interests. The perception of American forces fundamentally affects all other aspects of security in the Gulf. A warming of American and Muslim relations could lessen the intensity of Anti-American inflammatory remarks and protests. This could lead to greater economic opportunities for international trade, and lessen the need for Gulf States to pursue trade with other countries through backdoors and under secrecy.

How U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf evolves will affect naval strategy as much as anything else. The steps that America takes today have a substantial impact on security and stability in the Persian Gulf than at any other time in history. American foreign policy in a stable Persian Gulf would need to balance a continued push for economic and political reforms while maintaining stability and security throughout the Gulf. It would also need to engage the international community to insure the security of the region while calling for staunch adherence to NPT and other treaties to limit WMD proliferation in the region.

Finally, American will need to seriously and fairly address the Arab-Israeli peace-process in order to demonstrate American interests are better served through a peaceful resolution.

The Navy has historically provided the Gulf States with an over-the-horizon presence to insure security in the Gulf. The ability of the Navy to provide security while maintaining a small U.S. 'footprint' is a capability that will continue in the future. Naval presence is an important element in continuing to build and maintain strong relations with Gulf States. Naval Exercises assist in training and multinational cooperation amongst these states as well as provide assurance of United States commitment to Gulf security.

F. CONCLUSION: NAVAL RESPONSE

For this scenario, only a minimal military presence to include forward deployed naval units would be required. While force structure may change, the missions and purpose of the Navy will remain constant; guarantee regional access, exert national influence, and provide the ability to rapidly scale forces required to exploit the asymmetric advantage afforded by sea superiority.³⁴

Naval forces would act as a pillar in the Joint and coalition forces cooperating in the region to provide for over-arching security in the Gulf. After decades of deployments to the region, the Navy and Marine Corps are "familiar with the operating area and they give the Joint Force a knowledge advantage".³⁵ The dependence on the West and to a greater extent Asia, for oil will only intensify with time. By 2024, world oil demand is projected to be roughly 120 million barrels a day.³⁶ In order to preserve the security of free-market economies, the United States must continue to guarantee the free-flow of oil from the Persian Gulf.

³⁴ "Naval Operating Concept for Joint Operations" April 2003, p.1

³⁵ Ibid, p. 22

³⁶ Energy Information Administration/International Energy Outlook 2003, "World Oil Markets", p. 31

The presence of naval units also reassures regional friendships and allies and continues partnerships with global allies. “The presence of American forces overseas is one of the most profound symbols of the U.S. commitment to allies and friends”.³⁷ Naval port visits can also have an impact on regional security, and economies while limiting the American “footprint” that most countries in the region look to avoid. ³⁸

As U.S. forces become more integrated, they will also become more reliant on each other for intelligence and infrastructure vital for crisis management. “Penetrating and persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) will be obtained through the use of organic... unmanned and autonomous stealthy sensors that are located from the seabed to space and are fully integrated and networked with reconnaissance forces, manned platforms and maneuver elements”.³⁹ Although the scenario presented in this chapter paints a fairly optimistic view of future security in the Gulf, there must always be some realistic security measures in place in order to swiftly answer the call should any unexpected crisis arise.

Though this illustration of the Persian Gulf would not require the sizable forces needed in the 1990’s, it would be erroneous to believe that a force structure similar to that of the 1970’s would be sufficient to meet the Navy’s requirements in the Gulf. The lessons learned from the result of the Nixon era cannot be ignored. Minimal Naval forces in the Gulf could not have prevented the Islamic Revolution; however, a more significant naval presence could have reduced the ability to respond to the crisis. While a constant presence of a CSG in a “stable” Gulf could possibly distract from responsibilities elsewhere, frequent

³⁷ “National Security Strategy”, p. 29

³⁸ Donald C.F. Daniel, “The Future of American Naval Power: Propositions and Recommendations”, *Globalization and Maritime Power*, ed by Sam J. Tangredi, Washington D.C., National Defense University Press, December 2002, p. 509.

³⁹ “Naval Operating Concept”, p. 13-14

and periodic deployments would assure the Gulf States of America's commitment and interest in the region. The Navy could loosen their tethered mentality, and deploy forces periodically.⁴⁰ This would allow for a greater ability to 'surge' to other hot-spots around the globe and provide the opportunity for training and exercises to improve relations in the gulf and elsewhere.

⁴⁰ Daniel, "The Future of American Naval Power", p. 511

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IV. FUTURE SECURITY IN THE PERSIAN GULF: A WORST-CASE SCENARIO

March 26, 2024:

USS HALSEY is underway in the Northern Persian Gulf to observe, and monitor Iran and Iraq, in conjunction with providing TBMD to Israel. HALSEY is also providing Air Defense for USS New Orleans conducting final withdrawal of U.S. Marines from Southern Iraq. Aircraft from USS INDEPENDENCE is providing combat air support. This is the last withdraw effort since the terrorist bombings of Marine temporary compounds in Iraq.

USS REAGAN and USS TRUMAN and their CSG are operating in the Central Gulf conducting coordinated strikes on terrorist and key regime facilities in Iran and Iraq. USS GEORGIA launches a low-yield nuclear cruise missile (bunker buster) on an Iranian nuclear bunker in Central Iran, the second such attack in 6 months. USS CARTER is operating in the Gulf following a Chinese fleet conducting exercises with the Iranian navy.

USS THACH is handing over escort duties of four Kuwaiti oil tankers to USS JARRETT, before returning to the Northern Gulf. Terrorist attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf have crippled many western economies as oil prices have skyrocketed. The environmental consequences of the attacks on local fishing have led to a greater call for U.S. withdrawal from the Gulf. American ground forces in the region have been reduced in order to relieve the threat of terrorist attacks, and reduce the pressure on regional partners.

A. INTRODUCTION

The following chapter will present a “worst case” scenario for security in the Persian Gulf in 2024. It provides a realistic expectation of what could happen under certain sets of assumptions that are contradictory to those posed in the previous chapter, which in turn could destabilize and reduce security in the region. The stamina and direction of American policy in creating a new Iraqi government will have a far-reaching effect on the security of the entire Gulf. An increase in the proliferation of Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and a failure to make strides regarding the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) could undermine the stability of the region. A surge of anti-American sentiment could threaten U.S.

national interests and increase domestic pressure on the Gulf States. These challenges to the security in the Gulf would require the maintenance of a strong, continuous naval presence in the Persian Gulf in order to provide sanctuaries for U.S. forces protecting national interests.

B. IRAQ

The outcome in Iraq will have the greatest potential for disaster for the United States. Failure to create a viable government and ensure security within Iraq could lead many Iraqis toward Islamic extremists and anti-American groups. Breakdown in nation-building efforts could result in an escalation of terrorist attacks both in frequency and magnitude. If a series of terrorist attacks akin to the 1983 Marine Corps Barracks bombings in Lebanon occur followed by a demand for U.S. withdrawal, departure from Iraq would be seen as a demoralizing defeat of American forces. If the U.S. were forced to leave Iraq, it would encourage future terrorist attacks and promote extremism throughout the region.⁴¹

There is more riding on the future of Iraq than security concerns in the Persian Gulf. It will also effect future American foreign policy, America's role in the world and American security.⁴² Just as the ghosts of U.S. involvement in Vietnam continue to effect American foreign policy, the American experience with Iraq could have a similar effect. Failure in Iraq could lead other countries to be more cautious of accepting America's leadership.

Under "worst case" conditions The Navy must remain continuously prepared for crisis to arise in Iraq. It must be prepared to provide support for American forces in Iraq to include combat air missions and precision strikes against potential terrorist cells. The Navy's joint mission will also be to contribute

⁴¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Strategic and Grand Strategic Meaning of US Intervention in Iraq", Washington D.C. Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 5, 2003, p. 13

⁴² William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "The United States must be serious about its "generational commitments", *The Weekly Standard; Do What It Takes in Iraq*, September 1-September 8 issue

in ISR to Force Commanders on the ground. Another essential mission will be to ensure access into Iraq. Guaranteeing the security of maritime access into Iraq will be crucial to American peacetime security operations. The ability to provide a means for transportation of resources and material into and out of Iraq is critical for progress and economic stability. Finally, the Navy must be positioned to provide platforms for possible troop withdrawal or Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO)

C. WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

The gravest danger our Nation faces lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology. Our enemies have openly declared that they are seeking weapons of mass destruction, and evidence indicates that they are doing so with determination.⁴³

The ease and availability of technology, knowledge and hardware make covert procurement an option for political and international legitimacy. Iran is estimated to have nuclear capability by 2008; by 2024 they may have the missiles capable of striking Eastern Europe.⁴⁴ The elimination of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq has been cited as an important lesson for other countries in the region contemplating WMD proliferation. However, the case of Iraq could have an opposite reaction. OIF showed that no conventional force could hold up against the United States. WMD on the other hand could be seen as a balance to this threat. "The lesson is to follow India and Pakistan...equip yourself clandestinely with weapons that make even the White House think twice before attacking".⁴⁵

The proliferation dilemma could continue to spiral if the United States introduces small-scale, low-yield nuclear weapons (known as 'bunker busters') into the region. These weapons, used to destroy deep, hardened bunkers could

⁴³ "National Security Strategy"

⁴⁴ Rowan Scarborough, "Rumsfeld Targets 'Future Threats'", *Washington Times*, February 25, 2004

⁴⁵ Ian Williams, "The Law of Unintended Consequences: Will the War in Iraq Spur Proliferation?", *Foreign Policy In Focus*, April 14, 2003

force proliferators to further disperse their WMD sites and bury them deeper. A policy advocating use of any kind of nuclear weapons, except in response to a nuclear attack, will undermine nonproliferation efforts by suggesting to other states that nuclear weapons are legitimate and necessary tools that can achieve military or political objectives. If implemented, this policy only increases the odds that another country or group will race to acquire these terrible weapons.⁴⁶ Use of American weapons mass destruction could lead to retaliation “in kind” and result in WMD attacks on American’s and American interests.

The Navy will continue to play a vital role to detect and destroy potential WMD threats en route to their targets⁴⁷. A critical role will be the capability to protect the region under a Ballistic Missile Defense shield. Naval vessels will provide crucial initial detection of missiles from Iran toward Israel, or other Gulf allies. The Navy’s TBMD capability will be a key to further Cooperative Defense Initiatives (CDI) with GCC countries for their defense and the defense of American interests in the region.⁴⁸

The Navy will also provide platforms to conduct precision strikes to eliminate WMD facilities. These missions will allow for the entire spectrum of weapons to be available to combat WMD including low-yield nuclear missiles to penetrate hardened bunkers. These will incorporate carrier-based aircraft, as well as cruise missiles from surface or subsurface platforms.

D. GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM

Terrorist attacks could rise in both frequency and magnitude to possibly include Weapons of Mass Destruction. A 1999 DIA report claims “it is probable that terrorist organizations or individuals will employ a weapon of mass

⁴⁶ “New Nuclear Policies, New Weapons, New Dangers”, Arms Control Association Fact sheet, April 2003

⁴⁷ “National Strategy To Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction”, December 2002, p. 3

⁴⁸ Kenneth Katsman, “The Persian Gulf: Issues for U.S. Policy, 2003”, *Report for Congress*, Washington D.C., Congressional Research Service, February 3, 2003, p. 23

destruction against U.S. interests by 2020. These interests could include U.S. forces, regimes supporting or aiding America, or oil producing facilities and tankers. While any attack would be harmful, a threat to the transportation of oil from the Persian Gulf could have catastrophic effects on a global scale.

Another possibility is that future terrorist organizations could become more interconnected and structured. Such a union could integrate extremist groups currently splintered groups and coalesce fringe extremists into a truly “global” terrorist network. However, “Terrorism should not cause the United States to abandon its security interests and commitments in the region, but Al Qaeda’s focus on the U.S. presence in the Gulf underscores the need for Washington to adjust its profile over time and thus deny this target to those groups seeking to harm U.S. interests”⁴⁹ The need to reduce the American “footprint” in the Gulf could in turn reduce the opportunity for terrorist attacks against American troops.

The presence of the U.S. Navy is essential in this situation. Remote Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV’s) operated from sea could provide real-time intelligence and targeting information for counter-terrorist strikes. Armed UAV’s and cruise missiles could loiter in the vicinity of a target until final intelligence sources confirm their locations. A key component of the Global War on Terrorism is an ability to quickly strike targets with an element of surprise. Though the dots have been connected to enable long-range aircraft to strike targets in the Gulf, the U.S. footprint is still sizeable in Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Terrorist attacks on these bases could paralyze ground forces. Aircraft launched from forward airbases could forewarn potential targets of an imminent attack. Carrier based aircraft and missiles can be launched at targets without permission from host nations and provide for a level of surprise not found from ground forces.

⁴⁹ Joseph McMillian, Richard Sokolsky, and Andrew C. Winner, “Toward a New Regional Security Architecture”, The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *The Washington Quarterly* 26:3 (Summer 2003), p. 163

E. U.S. IDENTITY IN THE GULF

Finally, the further deterioration of U.S. prestige in the Gulf coupled with strong Islamist rhetoric could create a true “Clash of Civilizations” as envisioned by Samuel Huntington.⁵⁰ Failure to create a stable, “democratic” government could reinforce resentment and image of the United States as a colonial power. Extremists characterize American land-based forces as ‘crusaders’ conjuring up images of Christian knights occupying Muslim Holy lands during the Middle Ages.⁵¹ Continue with “next step” threats could further push Muslims away from the West and toward Islamic extremists. It could also build on the perception of American interference and sight American troops as a demonstration of American imperialism. “US rhetoric and moral posturing has so far had a largely destructive impact... And all Arab states, at least partially, fear that the U.S. may have broader regional ambitions”⁵²

With a growing swell of anti-American sentiment in the Gulf, ground forces deployed in the region become more of a target for Islamic extremist rhetoric and terrorist attacks. If the United States cannot work with regional powers to reduce the terrorist threat and holds the entire Arab region accountable for terrorist attacks, terrorist activists will fester and gain further momentum. Failure to curb terrorism could portray the United States as weak and unable to maintain security.

A further division of Arab-US relationship could cripple efforts to create regional security.⁵³ The U.S. will look for other means of maintaining security in the Gulf, by increasing the “over-the-horizon” presence offered by the Navy.

⁵⁰ See Samuel Huntington, “Clash of Civilizations” (Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993) for future conflict division over cultural/religious lines,

⁵¹ Roger Cliff, Sam J. Tangredi, and Christine E. Wormuth, “The Future of U.S. Overseas Presence”, *QDR 2001: Strategy-Driven Choices for America’s Security*, ed by Michele A. Flournoy, p. 248

⁵² Anthony H. Cordesman, “US Strategy in the Middle East: The Gap Between Strategic Theory and Operational Reality”, *GulfWire Perspective*, October 22, 2003

⁵³ Ibid

These forces will also be seen as a burden to the countries that host them as extremists look to target the regimes supporting the United States. The ability to access bases in Gulf countries will not always be guaranteed. Neutral states and even a few allies have been reluctant to grant the U.S. military unrestricted access to facilities or over flight rights at various points during the War on terror and during preparations for a potential invasion of Iraq. More of the same can be expected in the future. As a result the United States may increasingly rely on sea-based forces to conduct strike operations and support ground forces.

F. CONCLUSION: NAVAL RESPONSE

The scenario proposed above would intensify the need for Naval Forces in the Persian Gulf to provide improved freedom of action and better protection for friendly forces referred to in *Joint Vision 2020*.⁵⁴ A priority for naval forces will be to assure access to key facilities and ensure the continuous flow of oil through the Gulf. As in the mid-1980's, naval vessels would be required to escort oil tanker through the Gulf to protect shipping from terrorist. Protection from the threat from small boat attack could be accomplished with small combatant vessels (LCS or FFG), however, larger combatants (CG or DDG) would also be required to deter/defend against possible ASCM attacks. These larger combatants would also be required to conduct TBMD missions, monitoring Iran and Iraq for potential missile launches against U.S. interests.

The Navy would also need to use power projection capabilities in order to conduct coordinated strikes on terrorist camps and infrastructure and also WMD facilities in the region. Carriers and TLAM platforms in the region would be essential for this mission due to an increase in threats to ground forces and pressure from host nations. The Navy would also provide autonomous platforms should the U.S. decide to deploy/employ low-yield nuclear weapons in the region against hardened WMD targets.

⁵⁴ See "Joint Vision 2020", Washington D.C., US Government Printing Office, June 2000, for more information on Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff guidance for the military Joint Operations

The scope of these missions would require a presence that would be difficult to sustain the material readiness of ships and personnel. The focus of the navy would require numerous carriers to deploy into the region and continuously maintain station. Such a presence would drastically reduce the availability of maintenance and increase in the deterioration of the fleet. It would also restrict the Navy's ability to surge to other "hot-spots" around the globe and stretch forces to limits.

V. CONCLUSION

In 2020, the nation will face a wide range of interests, opportunities and challenges and will require a military that can both win wars and contribute to peace. The global interests and responsibilities of the United States will endure, and there is no indication that threats to those interests and responsibilities or to our allies, will disappear. The strategic concepts of decisive force, power projection, overseas presence, and strategic agility will continue to govern our efforts to fulfill those responsibilities and meet the challenges of the future.⁵⁵

While it is difficult to overstate the importance of America's national interests in the Persian Gulf, the means to secure these interests is often argued. The Navy's recent policy of "Fleet Response Plan", calls for multiple Carrier Strike Groups to rapidly response to crisis anywhere in the world, including the Persian Gulf, at a moments notice. Forces need to be available to surge into a region at the call of the President in respond to international crises. The ability to surge forces into a region has led some to believe that sustained presence in the Persian Gulf is no longer necessary. In analyzing the recent historical naval presence in the Persian Gulf a number of conclusions can be made as to where the Navy may go in the future.

A. A CASE FOR "MINIMAL PRESENCE"

The minimal deployment model of the 1970's may be a viable answer for those who question the necessity of forward-deployed naval units in the Persian Gulf. Proponents look toward the 1970's for an example of naval force structure to provide security in the Persian Gulf. The U.S. can no longer afford to send troops on routine deployments. With the air bases in Diego Garcia and Qatar, the dots have been connected to allow seemingly unlimited access to the Persian Gulf. The Air Force is more than capable of launching strikes in response to intelligence against terrorists from any number of bases either abroad or at

⁵⁵ "Joint Vision 2020", p. 1

home. The Navy no longer holds the monopoly on forward strike capabilities. This, coupled with the vanishing of former missions of carrier-based aircraft, Operation Southern Watch and UN sanction enforcement, aircraft carriers may no longer be necessary in the Gulf. Finally, the burden of routine deployments detracts from our ability to maintain a high level of readiness of multiple forces.

This model will provide naval forces necessary under a 'best-case' scenario; however, this option leaves significant gaps regarding short and long-term naval commitments. Token naval forces would only provide minimal capabilities to carry out missions to support the Global War on Terrorism. They will also need to assure access to Iraq's national resources in order to ensure Iraq's economic stability. Finally the Navy must provide forces to reassure Iraq and other countries of America's resolve for the stability of Iraq and the Persian Gulf. Ultimately, minimal forces would not provide significant force required for possible unexpected crises in the region.

B. A CASE FOR "PERIODIC PRESENCE"

Another course of action for naval forces could be modeled after the naval structure in the 1980's with a modest surface presence coupled with sustained carrier presence in the Indian Ocean with periodic excursions and the ability to surge into the Gulf. These forces will be called upon to deliver an overwhelming force to fight the War on Terrorism, and to deter nations from continuing their proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. The reduction of forces could calm anti-American rhetoric. Greater reliance on "Jointness" will place emphasis on all forward deployed forces for the security in the Gulf and make use of basing agreements in the Gulf.

While naval missions of the post-gulf war are gone, there still remains a necessary requirement for carrier forward deployed presence in the Gulf. The fall of the Iraqi regime does not mean there is no longer a need for Naval forces in the Northern Gulf. Naval forces will be required to provide joint support for Iraq

and the Global War on Terrorism. Routine port visits can reinforce security for regional allies, without drawing the negative political perception that forward bases have on host regimes. The visual presence of Naval forces not only symbolizes American power, but assures allies and adversaries that the United States is prepared to protect its interests and meet security challenges should a crisis arise. Furthermore, naval forces must be present to deal with any unexpected attack that could result in significant losses before surge forces arrive.⁵⁶

C. A CASE FOR “CONTINUOUS PRESENCE”

In the spectrum between the posed “best” and “worst-case” scenarios, the most probable scenario resembles something closer to the later and historical analysis of the region indicates a high probability of an unexpected event effecting security in the Gulf in the foreseeable future. The model that provides the best solution for future scenarios will be naval presence similar to that of the 1990’s with a continual carrier presence in the Gulf. The threats of WMD proliferation and technological advancement continue to endanger U.S. interests. While the presence of the U.S. Navy has not been characterized as a viable deterrence to nuclear proliferation, the Navy will continue to play an important role in threat reduction and defense. The Navy’s missions as delineated in *Sea Power 21* are to provide the capabilities to project power ashore (Sea Strike) and to defend American interests from missile attack (Sea Shield)⁵⁷. Regarding counter-proliferation, naval forces afford commanders the ability to strike WMD facilities by whatever means necessary from a variety of platforms. Surface Naval forces will also provide Regional Ballistic Missile Defense and ensure regional security from possible missile attack.

⁵⁶ Richard L. Kugler, “Naval Overseas Presence in the New U.S. Defense Strategy”, *Globalization and Maritime Power*, ed. by Sam J. Tangredi, Washington D.C., National Defense University Press, December 2002, p. 289

⁵⁷ Admiral Vern Clark, “Sea Power 21: Projecting Decisive Joint Capabilities” *Proceedings*, October 2002

The Global War on Terrorism requires a constant, capable presence with the ability and flexibility to strike at a moments notice. The sovereignty of U.S. carriers allows them to work under complete autonomy in international waters. Aircraft can be launched at targets without worrying about host country intentions and permission. Land based aircraft lose the element of surprise needed to strike terrorist targets of opportunity. The overt nature of land-based launches could trigger terrorist cells of an upcoming attack. Operations conducted from a carrier are carried out with little knowledge from the surrounding countries and do not compromise the element of surprise.

With the growing anti-American sentiment across the world, American troops on the ground are becoming a political liability in both the international and domestic realms. Naval deployments to the Gulf can provide military might without the drastic footprint that other forces rely on. The carrier presence in the Gulf is the best way to ensure the security of our allies in the region without adding the domestic pressures from having troops on the ground. "Our key enabler is our persistence, our ability to remain on station indefinitely without the need for outside logistics support."⁵⁸

D. RECOMENDATION

The Fleet Response Plan has raised new questions regarding forward presence and traditional navy roles and deployment cycles. America is the undisputed heavyweight in the world, and the Persian Gulf. As evidence in Operation Iraqi freedom, the U.S. does not need permission from the international community to protect its interests in the Persian Gulf. "The global environment and our defense strategy call for a military with the ability to respond swiftly to a broad range of scenarios and defend the vital interests of the United States".⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Rear Admiral Mark Edwards, "Presence with a Purpose: surface Navy shields forces afloat, ashore", *Armed Forces Journal*, March 2004

⁵⁹ Clark, "Sea Power 21"

Yet, in order to pursue these interest the U.S. must also seek the fine line between providing security and becoming the threat. The overt nature of ground forces often pose dangers for host countries facing extremist opposition. Gulf States will only allow the presence of forces on their soil until they become a threat to the regimes legitimacy. Ground forces also provide stationary targets for potential terrorists.

The Navy's role has evolved over the last 30 years, but its basic purpose endures: project power over land and sea in support of national objectives and provide unfettered access to all parts of the globe.⁶⁰ The United States must continue to maintain persistent power projection forces in the Middle East. The best way to protect those interests is by maintaining a constant carrier presence in the Gulf while maintaining the ability to surge forces to respond to crises. FRP promotes "deploying with a purpose", then the purpose to deploy to the Persian Gulf is clear: Iraq, Iran's WMD, GWOT. These along with the unpredictability of future events in the Gulf require the continued presence of forward-deployed naval forces.

⁶⁰ Edwards, "Presence with a purpose"

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